**Matt Heiser**

**Cascadia Community College**

**Ethnography & Ethnology**

**I. Introduction:**

For my case study I chose to study the surrounding clientele of the large grocery store Albertsons, I chose two site locations to study and compare because I felt there were such strong variations that I had to look at two to better understand. The first one, Mill Creek Albertsons I chose because its clientele is a wide spread collection of social statuses and class systems. The second store I observed was the Lynnwood Albertsons; I chose this site because its clientele is more of a lower income/lower class base. I observed these locations from an inside direct perspective as an employee for the Albertsons Company. I chose to study the cultural aspect of grocery stores because it is a common thing that everyone needs to do, which is buy/get food to eat. I will discuss how the stores and clients are affected by the surrounding economy as well as the variations between the two different client class locations, purchasing trends and crime. More details of which might have been helpful, would have been to see; a total customer count over the course of a month, which store had more customers, which sold more items, total weekly gross, and graph of what types of items were sold. With those numbers and figures I think we would better see the direct correlation of how each store/customer is affected by the surrounding economy.

**II. Methodology:**

As a manager at Albertsons my perspective is one of direct interaction and observation. The reason I have chosen these two sites to observe is both these stores do about the same weekly gross and that they both provide two opposite spectrums; Mid/high class verses a lower income class within living/shopping locations. My observations were mainly made from Afternoon until late night. This will give us a better look at two different class systems to compare and contrast similarities of these everyday common tasks within today’s society. My goals are to better understand and connect the surrounding economy with the store and clients reactions to such. Since a majority of my observations were made from an inside perspective, I was able to get a better understanding of the process as a whole, both the goals of the clients as well as the stores.

**III. Data Presentation and Analysis:**

1. **Albertsons in general:** Is one of many grocery stores located in the Puget Sound. Its main goal is to make life easier for its customers. Provides a variety of different types of grocery needs to the local/surrounding areas in which they are located. Albertsons sets its ads/sales the same throughout a general area. The stores generally provide all the same products with slight variations between locations. The overall goal of any company is to be profitable and provide service to its surrounding area.
2. **Mill Creek Albertsons Observations: This** store is located on the crossroads of 164th and Bothell Everett Highway, Mill Creek Washington. This area is a mid/high level income area; the average annual household income is approximately $83,000. The average crime rate in this area is low to moderate. The store has recently been remodeled and has a clean new look. Customer interactions with employees, majority of them were friendly but some customers neglected to respond to “Hello, how are you doing this evening”. Giving the outside appearance that they were either in a bad mood or too good to talk to anyone.
3. **Lynnwood Albertsons Observations**: This store is located on the crossroads of Highway 99 and 196th St. Lynnwood Washington. This area is a moderately lower income area; the average annual household income is approximately $51,500. The average crime rate is moderate to high. This store looks older you can tell that the store has been around a while and has its rough spots. The majority of customer interactions at this store were all friendly with little to none instances of discontent.
4. **Comparisons/Differences:** Since both of the stores run the same ads/sales, are extremely alike. Both stores have customers who utilize coupons and take advantages of the sale prices. I made it a habit to watch certain items that people tend to buy the most; cereal, milk, laundry detergent and varieties of canned foods. This brings the first major difference between stores; the Lynnwood stores sales mainly comes from selling ad items, where the Mill Creek store sales comes from an array of different products and sales of non ad items. This shows the difference in how people shop, the people of the Lynnwood store tend to be more of the type to make their dollar last and but primarily things that are on sale, whereas the Mill Creek clients tend to buy whatever it is they have always purchased, on sale or not! From my observations this is primarily due to the surrounding income and social structure therefore it offers different purchasing standards or trends. A observation I made about a new type of customer that is rapidly growing and a commonality between stores is that of customers I call “Coupon Bloggers”, they are people who have IPhone apps dedicated to finding coupon deals. More often than not get them product for free or mere pocket change. I believe most these Coupon Bloggers do actually utilize the products in which they receive, but there are some who take advantage the system and make ten to fifteen trips through the line, end up with $100 worth of product for $10 only to turn around and sell it or pack it away for who knows what.

Another thing to compare or contrast would be the crime rate within the stores as well as surrounding areas. The crime rates of the areas are slightly skewed and different but the crimes within the stores are quite similar. I consider there to be three types of theft when it comes to grocery stores; 1st petty theft being classified as small items, 2nd large quantity theft being a large cart full of items to be consumed by people struggling within the economy and 3rd drug related theft relating to items people steal in quantity, to sell or trade for drugs. Both stores have the normal petty thefts of which happen every day and more often than not go unnoticed. They both have the occasional drug related thefts, which usually end up being high dollar items that can be sold on EBay or turned into a quick buck. But the key to the differences on this one is that of frequency and/or quantity. The Lynnwood store tends to have higher frequency of smaller petty theft in the range of $10-50, whereas the Mill Creek store has a lesser frequency but larger quantity of theft in the range of $25-200. Which in this case it is the complete opposite of the surrounding areas, the lower income area has more frequent theft, and the higher income areas more stuff is stolen but fewer times.

1. **Analysis/Worldview:** My analysis of these two stores is a simple one, and I consider most of it to be linked to the fairly recent decline of the economy. Trends develop through all types of cultures in order for its population to survive. The stores and their surrounding clientele interact and react with/to each other, as the economy changes so does the clientele. As the clientele adapt to their specific situations the stores have to cater to those needs. This is where the worldview comes into view, as the stores buy products from suppliers. Suppliers down to the farmers that grow it. They want to get the best quality for the lowest price. This potentially allows the company to make money and provide its customers with the best deals. Since the prices are dropping the norm for quality is either raising or lowering, therefore leveling the differences between stores.

IV. Ethnology

V. Conclusion:

As I observed customers interactions with Albertsons and its employees I noticed many things and none gave me a clear 100% picture. I was attempting to better understand the relation in why people bought what they did, or why there was such a different variation in crime in comparison to their surroundings and the economy. The only conclusion I can come to is that different class levels react differently when faced with hardship. The lower income areas may have struggled prior to this economic decrease and have been more prone to difficult times, therefore adapting to times came easier. Whereas the higher income location is set in their ways of getting what they want, when they want and they are going to buy whatever it is they have always bought. So between these two similar grossing stores, with two completely different client bases, I would have to say that they are slowly starting to mesh together. The two opposite spectrums are becoming one in the same, the name brand products that were expensive before are now reasonable with all of the sales/deals making a higher class product available to a lower class client.